

Dark Hollow

By Anna Katharine Green

Illustrations by C. D. Rhodes

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SYNOPSIS.

A curious crowd of neighbors invade the mysterious home of Judge Ostrander, county judge and eccentric recluse, following a veiled woman who proves to be the widow of a man tried before the judge and electrocuted for murder years before. Her daughter is engaged to the judge's son, from whom he is estranged, but the murder is between the lovers. She plans to clear her husband's memory and asks the judge's aid. Deborah Scoville reads the newspaper clippings telling the story of the murder of Algonquin Etheridge by John Scoville in Dark Hollow, twelve years before. The judge and Mrs. Scoville meet at Spencer's Folly and she shows him how, on the day of the murder, she saw the shadow of a man, whittling a stick and wearing a long peaked cap. The judge engages her and her daughter Reuther to live with him in his mysterious home. Deborah and Reuther see the stick used to murder Etheridge. She discovers a broken knife-blade point embedded in it. Deborah and Reuther go to live with the judge. Deborah sees a portrait of Oliver, the judge's son, with a black band painted across the eyes. That night she finds in Oliver's room, a cap with a peak like the shadowed one, and a knife with a broken blade-point. Anonymous letters and a talk with Miss Weeks increase her suspicions and fears. She finds that Oliver was in the ravine on the murder night. Black warns her and shows her other anonymous letters hinting at Oliver's guilt. In the court room the judge is handed an anonymous note. The note is picked up and read aloud. A mob follows the judge to his home. Deborah tells him why suspicion has been aroused against Oliver.

CHAPTER XIII—Continued.

Once within the room, he became his courteous self once more. "Be seated," he begged, indicating a chair in the half gloom. As she took it, the room sprang into sudden light. He had pulled the string which regulated the curtains over the glazed panes in the ceiling. Then as quickly all was gloom again; he had let the string escape from his hand.

"Half light is better," he muttered in vague apology.

It was a weird beginning to an interview whose object was as yet incomprehensible to her. One minute a blinding glimpse of the room whose details were so varied that many of them still remained unknown to her—the next, everything swept again into shadow through which the tall form of the genius of the place loomed with melancholy suggestion!

She was relieved when he spoke.

"Mrs. Scoville (not Deborah now) have you any confidence in Oliver's word? Has there ever been anything in his conversation as you knew it in Detroit to make you hesitate to reply?" the judge persisted, as she continued speechless.

"No; nothing. I have every confidence in his assertions. I should have yet, if it were not for this horror."

"Forget it for a moment. Recall his effect upon you as a man, a prospective son-in-law—for you meant him to marry Reuther."

"I trusted him. I would trust him in many ways yet."

"Would you trust him enough to believe that he would tell you the truth if you asked him point-blank whether his hands were clean of crime?"

"Yes." The word came in a whisper; but there was no wavering in it. She had felt the conviction dark like an arrow through her mind that Oliver might slay a man in his hate—might even conceal his guilt for years—but that he could not lie about it when brought face to face with an accuser like herself.

"Then I will let you read something he wrote at my request these many years ago: An experience—the tale of one awful night, the horrors of which, locked within his mind and mine, have never been revealed to a third person. That you should share our secret now is not only necessary, but fitting. It becomes the widow of John Scoville to know what sort of a man she reverts in regarding innocent. Wait for me."

With a quick step he wound his way among the various encumbering pieces of furniture to his bedroom. Here he lingered so long that, without any conscious volition of her own she found herself on her feet, but she had not had time to repeat herself when she beheld him approaching with the bundle of loose sheets clutched in his hand.

"I want you sit here and read," said he, laying the manuscript down on a small table near the wall under a gas jet which he immediately lighted. "I am going back to my own desk. If you want to speak, you may; I shall not be working." And she heard his foot-steps retreating again in and out among the furniture till he reached his own chair and sat before his own table.

This ended all sound in the room excepting the beating of her own heart, which had become tumultuous.

Thank God! the manuscript was legible. Oliver's handwriting possessed the clearness of print. She had begun to read before she knew it, and having begun, she never paused till she reached the end.

I was fifteen. It was my birthday and I had my own ideas of how I wanted to spend it. My hobby was modeling. My father had no sympathy with this hobby. To him it was a waste of time better spent in study or such sports as would fit me for study. When on the day I mentioned I had a few hours of freedom, I decided to begin the remodeling in clay of an exquisite statue which had greatly aroused my admiration.

This statue stood in a forbidden place. It was one of the art treasures of the great house on the bluff commonly called Spencer's Folly. I had seen this marble once, when dining there with father, and was so impressed by its beauty that it haunted me night and day. The boy of fifteen would attempt the impossible. I procured my clay and then awaited my opportunity. It came, as I have said, on my birthday.

There was no one living in the house at this time. Mr. Spencer had gone West for the winter. The servants had been dismissed, and the place closed.

What to every other person in town would have seemed an insuperable obstacle to this undertaking, was no obstacle to me. I knew how to get in.



"I Want You to Sit Here and Read," Said He.

One day in my restless wanderings about a place which had something of the nature of a shrine to me, I had noticed that one of the windows (a swinging one) overlooking the ravine moved as the wind took it. Either the lock had given way or it had not been properly fastened. If I could only bring myself to disregard the narrowness of the ledge separating the house from the precipice beneath I felt that I could reach this window and sever the vines sufficiently for my body to press in; and this I did that night. I let myself go—I had to—and immediately found myself standing upright in a space so narrow I could touch the walls on either side. It was a closet I had entered, opening into the huge dining hall, where I had once sat beside my father at the one formal meal of my life.

I remembered that room; it had made a great impression upon me, and some light finding its way through the panes of uncurtained glass which topped each of the three windows overlooking the ravine, I soon was able to find the door leading into the drawing room.

I had brought a small lantern in the bag slung to my shoulders, but I had not hitherto dared to use it on account of the transparency of the panes I have mentioned; but once in the perfectly dark recesses of the room beyond, I drew it out, and without the least fear of detection boldly turned it upon the small alcove where stood the object of my adoration. I knelt

before the glimmering marble and unrolled my bundle of wet clay.

I began my work, then I began to realize a little the nature of the task I had undertaken and to ask myself whether if I stayed all night I could finish it to my mind. It was during one of these moments of hesitation that I heard the first growl of distant thunder.

But the thunder growled again and my head rose, this time in real alarm. A man—two men were entering by the great front door. I heard a loud laugh, and the tippy exclamation of a voice I knew:

"There! shut the door, can't you, before it's blown from its hinges? You'll find everything jolly here. Wine, lights, solitude in which to finish our game and a roaring good opportunity to sleep afterwards."

The answer I failed to catch. I was simply paralyzed by terror. As the door of the room opened to admit them, I succeeded in shutting that of the closet into which I had flung myself—or almost so. I did not dare to latch it, for they were already in the room and might hear me.

"This is the spot for us," came in Spencer's most jovial tones. "Big table, whisky handy, cards right here in my pocket. Wait, till I strike a light!"

A gas jet shot up, then two, then all that the room contained. "How's that? What's a flash more or less now?"

I heard no answer, only the slap of the cards as they were flung onto the table; then the clatter of a key as it turned in some distant lock.

The bottles were brought forward and they sat down one on each side of the dusty mahogany table. The man facing me was Spencer, the other sat with his back my way.

"We'll play till the hands point to three," announced Spencer, taking out his watch and laying it down where both could see it. "Do you agree to that?—unless I win and your funds go a-begging before that hour?"

"I agree." The tone was harsh; it was almost smothered. The man was staring at the watch; there was a strange set look to his figure; a pausing as of thought—of sinister thought, I should now say; then I never stopped to characterize it; it was followed too quickly by a loud laugh and a sudden grab at the cards.

"You'll win! I feel it in my bones," came in encouraging tones from the rich man. "If you do"—here the storm lulled and his voice sank to an encouraging whisper—"you can buy the old tavern up the road. It's going for a song; and then we'll be neighbors and can play—play—"

The bills had all gone one way. They fell within Spencer's grasp. Suddenly hard upon a rattling peal which seemed to unite heaven and earth, I heard shouted out:

"Half-past two! The game stops at three."

"Damn your greedy eyes!" came back in a growl. Then all was still, fearfully still, both in the atmosphere outside and in that within, during which I caught sight of the stranger's hand moving slowly around to his back and returning as slowly forward, all under cover of the table-top and a stack of half-empty bottles.

"I can buy the Claymore tavern, can I? Well, I'm going to," rang out into the air as the speaker leaped to his feet. "Take that, you cheat! And that! And that!" And the shots rang out—one, two, three!

Spencer was dead in his Folly. I had seen him rise, throw up his hands and then fall in a heap among the cards and glasses.

Then the man who stood there alone turned slightly and I saw his face. I have seen it many times since; I have seen it at Claymore tavern. He put the weapon back in his pocket and began gathering up the money. When every bill was in his pockets he reached out his hand for the watch. Then I saw him smile. He smiled as he shut the case, he smiled as he plunged it in after the bills.

Next moment I woke to a realization of myself and all the danger of my own position. I had the instinct to make a leap for the window over my head and clutch at its narrow sill in a wild attempt at escape.

But the effort ended precipitately. He was coming toward me—a straining, panting figure—half carrying, half dragging, the dead man who flopped aside from his arms. My senses blurred and I knew nothing till on a sudden they cleared again, and I woke to the blessed realization that the door had been pushed against my slender figure, hiding it completely from his sight, and that this door was now closed again and this time tightly, and I was safe—safe!

The relief sent the perspiration in a reek from every pore; but the icy revulsion came quickly. As I drew up knees to get a better purchase on the sill, heaven's torch was suddenly lit up, the closet became a pit of dazzling whiteness amid which I saw the blot of that dead body, with head propped against the wall and eyes—

Remember, I was but fifteen. The legs were hunched up and almost touched mine. The door—the door—there was my way—the only way

which would rid me instantly of any proximity to this hideous object. I flung myself at it—found the knob—turned it and yelled aloud—my foot had brushed against him. I knew the difference and it sent me palpitating over the threshold; but no farther. Love of life had returned with my escape from that awful prison house, and I halted in the semidarkness into which I had plunged, thanking heaven for the thunder peal which had drowned my loud cry.

For I was not yet safe. He was still there. He had turned out all lights but one. He had not seen me and was going. I could hear the sound of his feet as he went stumbling in his zigzag course toward the door. Then every sound both on his part and on mine was lost in a swoop of down-falling rain and I remember nothing more till out of the blackness before me, he started again into view, within the open doorway where in the glare of what he called heaven's candles he stood, poised himself to meet the gale which seemed ready to catch him up and whirl him with other inconsequent things into the void of nothingness. Then darkness settled again and I was left alone with Murder—all the innocence of my youth



He Had Not Seen Me and Was Going.

gone, and my soul a very charnel house.

I had to re-enter that closet; had to take the only means of escape proffered. But I went through it as we go through the horrors of nightmare.

I simply did it and escaped all—lightning flash and falling limb, and the lasso of swirling winds—to find myself at last lying my full length along the bridge amid a shock of elements such as nature seldom sports with. Here I clung, for I was breathless, waiting with head buried in my arm for the rain to abate before I attempted a further escape from the place which held such horror for me!

But no abatement came, and feeling the bridge shaking under me almost to cracking, I began to crawl, inch by inch, along its gaping boards till I reached its middle.

There God stopped me.

For, with a clangor as of rending worlds, a bolt hot from the zenith, sped down upon the bluff behind me, throwing me down again upon my face and engulfing sense and understanding for one wild moment. Then I sprang upright and with a yell of terror sped across the rocking boards beneath me to the road, no longer battling with my desire to look back; no longer asking myself when and how that dead man would be found; no longer even asking my own duty in the case; for Spencer's Folly was on fire and the crime I had just seen perpetrated there would soon be a crime stricken from the sight of men forever.

In the flare of its tremendous burning I found my way up through the forest road to my home and into my father's presence. He like everybody else was up that night, and already alarmed at my continued absence.

"Spencer's Folly is on fire," I cried, as he cast dismayed eyes at my pallid and dripping figure. "If you go to the door, you can see it!"

But I told him nothing more.

Perhaps other boys of my age can understand my silence.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Skunks Enemies of Caterpillars.

A new field of usefulness has been found for the much-ridiculed skunk in the fact that it is a vigorous enemy of the full-grown range caterpillars. Birds are of no service whatever in destroying these large caterpillars, but skunks devour quantities of them, and this is another reason why these little creatures should receive more consideration than they now do.

Measures Here and Abroad.

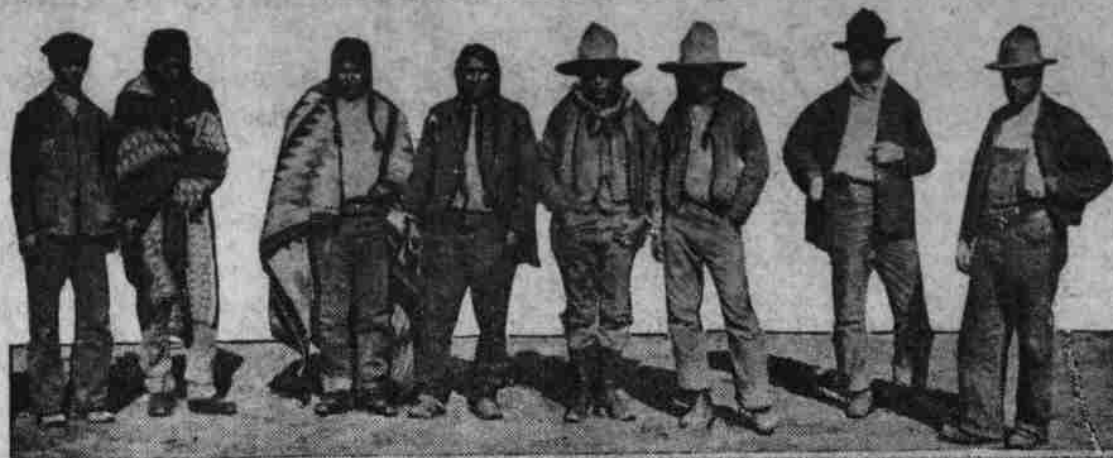
A yard and a pound are "for all practical and most scientific purposes" (as the editor of Nature remarks) the same in the United States and in Great Britain. The United States gallon is only five-sixths of the imperial gallon, and the United States bushel approximately thirty-two-thirds of the imperial bushel. Our standard meter is the international prototype meter; that of Great Britain is shorter than ours by sixteenths of a micron, or 2,364-billionths of an inch.

MUCH JOY IN ANTICIPATION

Its Stimulating Effect Seldom Given the Credit Which It So Thoroughly Deserves.

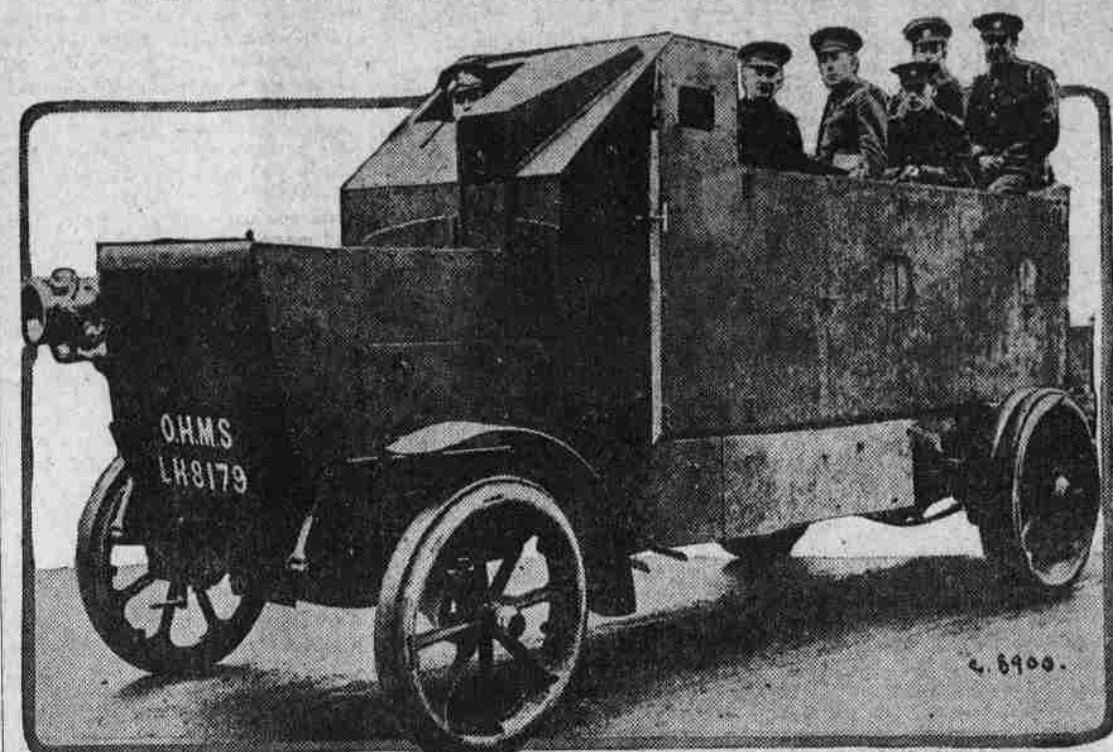
Few people realize how much benefit they obtain from anticipation. Indeed, were it not for its stimulating effect upon our minds the joy of living would vanish because by looking forward into the future and trying to realize our pleasures and ambitions before they actually come to us we largely increase their happy effects. The man who is unable to anticipate the future in any way whatever, who sees no reason in trying to taste his joys beforehand, who derives no satisfaction in building upon his hopes, misses a great deal of very wholesome pleasure. Common sense tells him, so he argues, that it is unwise to count upon anything in this life unless it is actually in his grasp, but then most of us act contrary to the routine teaching of common sense. We do not mean by this, of course, that it is ever best to ignore our better judgment

RENEGADE PIUTES CAPTURED



Group of the renegade Piutes and their captors. The band was captured in Utah after a stiff fight with the posse.

PREPARED TO DEFEND YARMOUTH AGAINST GERMANS



British armored car filled with home protection soldiers in the streets of Yarmouth, ready to defend that city against attacks by the Germans.

STAMPING GERMAN BREAD WITH "K" FOR KAISER



Thousands upon thousands of loaves of bread are turned out daily by the German army's numerous modernly equipped bakeries. Our picture shows a government inspector on the right supervising the work and an apprentice marking the bread with the initial "K."

PRIVATE BOMBPROOF ON ENGLISH COAST



Since the German raid on the East coast of England many of the residents have built bombproof dug-outs to which they can retire in case of a repetition of the bombardment. The fort in the picture was erected by a man in Scarborough.

ROBERT W. WOOLLEY



Robert W. Woolley is the successor of George E. Roberts as director of the mint. Mr. Woolley is a well-known magazine writer.

POETRY AT SLUMBER TIME

Right Kind of Reading Will Compose the Mind for Proper and Satisfying Rest.

An exchange recommends the reading of a fine soul-felt poem before retiring for the night's rest. It tends to compose the soul and put it in harmony with the truth and goodness of things. A novel will not do that, nor a newspaper, nor anything that sets the mind in a flutter. Reading a poem—one of the good old kind that goes into the heart and has a nice time there, is like floating down a quiet stream, past the fragrance of mowers and the song of the birds. Never had that experience, eh? Now, very shiftness, indeed!

Did you ever try reading "Snow-Bound" on an evening when the snow was piling up the "silent deep and white"? Well, try it, when the weather allows. Whittier will give you something for any evening. Tennyson's Idylls are a little more urgent, but they are as tranquillizing as a gentle arm around you. Wordsworth is great, but

takes too much thought; Browning, too, and Lowell, but Longfellow not much. But as easy as smiling is the humorous kind, like Riley. But there are hundreds of poems floating about as sweet as a bush of roses. Take them in and read them before going to bed.

Big Game, Sure.

A senator from a southern state always has an abundance of good southern tales at his command. Here is one he tells of some friends of his who were visiting in Savannah, and who had chartered an old broken-down hack driven by a negro. The old fellow was a native, and, of course, was on his job in pointing out all the places of interest along the route. As they jogged along out in the suburbs a squirrel appeared in the road. That was sufficient to arouse intense interest in one of the party, who inquired, anxiously:

"Do you have any big game around here?"

"Yes, sub; indeed, sub," replied the driver. "We has baseball."—Harper's Magazine.